

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 199, 189, 191, 210, 203.

Lessons: Job 19:25-27, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11, Matthew 28:1-8.

Sermon Text: John 20:1-18

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

For many people in our country, Sunday is a day to sleep in after five days of working and a day of getting at Saturday chores around the house. In Judea at the time of Jesus, Sunday would have been the first day of the work week, after the Sabbath, which was a day of rest. But Scripture today tells us of some women who didn't sleep in on a particular Sunday, who were up at sunrise to accomplish something very important to them. John names one of them and Luke and Mark tell us that she and the other women brought spices to anoint the body of their dead friend and Savior, Jesus of Nazareth. Remember that Jesus had been beaten, flogged, and crucified. Isaiah says ***“his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness.”*** Isaiah 52:14 (NIV) So they had good reason to want to care for his body which was hurriedly wrapped and put in the tomb three days earlier. Let's review what happened to Mary Magdalene on

THE MORNING OF THE RESURRECTION

1. **The tomb is empty.**
2. **Mary Magdalene is crying but she sees Jesus, and**
3. **She shares the message of the Resurrection.**

Mary Magdalene had special reason to honor Jesus, because she is one of the ***“women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases.”*** Luke 8:2 (NIV) She is the one from whom Jesus had driven out seven demons. Did you notice how promptly she came to the tomb?

Mary and the other women had prepared spices to honor Jesus by anointing his body as was the custom of the Jews. Luke tells us that ***“The women who had come with Jesus from Galilee followed Joseph [of Arimathea] and saw the tomb and how his body was laid in it. Then they went home and prepared spices and perfumes. But they rested on the Sabbath in obedience to the commandment.”*** Luke 23:55-56 (NIV)

They knew and had seen where Jesus' dead body had been laid. Mark tells us that ***“Joseph [of Arimathea] bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where he was laid.”*** Mark 15:46-47 (NIV) Remember that was not a hole dug in the ground but it was like a cave carved into the rock.

Did they realize they would need someone roll the stone away from the tomb? ***“Very early on the first day of the week, just after sunrise, they were on their way to the tomb and they asked each other, ‘Who will roll the stone away from the entrance of the tomb?’”*** Mark 16:2-3 (NIV)

But Mary ***“saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance.”*** She did not know what to do. She came running to Peter and John and said ***“They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!”*** She had not found the tomb of Jesus as she had expected. It was empty. There was no body. Peter and John didn't know what to make of this either. These two men ran to the tomb and John got there first. ***“He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in.”*** John saw that the tomb was empty.

“Then Simon Peter, who was behind him, arrived and went into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, as well as the burial cloth that had been around Jesus' head. The cloth was folded up by itself, separate from the linen.”

The brash, bold Simon Peter went into the tomb. Remember that Peter had special reason to be upset at the death of his Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. He had denied him three times and then Jesus' trials had been concluded and Jesus was crucified. Peter had no opportunity to repent and receive Jesus' forgiveness.

“Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed.” He obviously believed that the tomb was empty, that Jesus was not there, but Scripture tells us that ***“They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.”***

So what should they do now? Their Master, their Lord, their leader, had been crucified like the worst of criminals three days earlier. His body had then been placed into the tomb but now it was not there. There was obviously nothing they could do here. Were they afraid? Were they concerned that someone perhaps had stolen Jesus' body? After all, soldiers had been placed on guard at the tomb. ***“The chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate. ‘Sir,’ they said, ‘we remember that while he was still alive that deceiver said, “After three days I will rise again.” So give the order for the tomb to be made secure until the third day. Otherwise, his disciples may come and steal the body and tell the people that he has been raised from the dead. This last deception will be worse than the first.’ ‘Take a guard,’ Pilate answered. ‘Go, make the tomb as secure as you know how.’ So they went and made the tomb secure by putting a seal on the stone and posting the guard.”*** Matthew 27:62-66 (NIV)

But notice that John very pointedly says ***“They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.”*** This is a confession. John admits he didn't believe yet that Jesus had risen from the dead. It took additional events to make this clear to him, such as the things that happened later that same day. Yet even at the time of Jesus' ascension into heaven forty days later Scripture tells us that some of his followers still didn't understand that his work on earth was completed. Some asked him at the time of his ascension ***“Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?”*** Acts 1:6 (NIV) Scripture says Peter and John went back to their homes. Now what would they do?

“But Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb.” She was crying because she could not honor her Lord's body, her Master's body. And Scripture says that as she wept she bent over to look into the tomb ***“and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus' body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot.”***

“They asked her, ‘Woman, why are you crying?’” There is no mention of her reaction to the angels. She was crying and obviously she didn't react to the question of the angels except to make reference to the missing body of her Lord. Her answer is: ***“‘They have taken my Lord away,’ she said, ‘and I don't know where they have put him.’”***

Here Scripture specifically says she calls him ***“my Lord.”*** That tells us about her faith.

Think for a moment how people use that phrase “my Lord”. It's used as a curse word. It's misused as merely an exclamation. Such a use is actually a misuse of God's name, taking it in vain. Isn't it amazing that we so casually hear and fall into the sin of misusing the name of the Lord God? People say what they hear. And we hear misuse of God's name all the time too, don't we? It has gotten so that even the broadcast media such as radio and television especially have no qualms about using God's name in vain, misusing the name of God. There was a time that some of you hearers can remember when we didn't hear misuse of God's name on radio and television and in music. Music that mocked the name of God or misused the name of God just was not played publicly. That's a sad commentary on our world today, and on sin, and upon our sins too, for don't we so easily listen and fall into the same trap of misusing God's name? But here Mary uses the expression “my Lord” to refer to Jesus Christ, Lord and Master, the one who saved her. He saved her not only by redeeming her in this life, but he prepared her for life eternal in heaven.

Then ***“she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus.”*** She saw Jesus but did not recognize him. Doesn't it often happen that when something happens in our lives we do not recognize God's working? It may be the big things in life that we do not always recognize the hand of God

controlling all things in the world. But sometimes even in the little things in life we just do not recognize God's hand. We do not recognize or acknowledge that God is working in our lives.

“Woman,” he said, ‘why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?’ Thinking he was the gardener, she said, ‘Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.’” Probably still blinded by her tears, and surely not recognizing who it was that was talking to her, she assumes that Jesus' body has been carried away and asks this man if he had carried it away. She wants to find; she must find his body. She didn't expect to see Jesus. She may have thought his body had been stolen. Jesus may have looked different than he did before, because at our resurrection, our bodies will be glorified, although we will still know one another. And finally, Jesus may have intentionally kept her from recognizing him at first.

Perhaps she wanted to be able to hold on to him. We know that the women wanted to honor his body with spices now that he was dead. Now it is true that many, many people throughout history have tried to honor their dead and display respect for loved ones when they die. And yet we must remember that any dead body is just clay or dust. It has no life. The soul has left the body. We read in Ecclesiastes: **“The dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”** Ecclesiastes 12:7 (NIV)

Some people have gone to great extremes in preserving and trying to honor dead bodies. There have been political leaders whose bodies have been embalmed and placed on display for years, as if this will help keep their memory alive. I don't think this is the way that Mary and the other women wanted to honor Jesus. They surely will miss him now that he was dead. And it is true that Mary seemed to want to grasp him, to hang on to him. But his followers realized that there would be no benefit for them to simply keep the dead body of Jesus near them. And, of course, there was no longer a dead body!

All it took was a word of Jesus here. How he said it we don't know. But when she heard his voice and turned to him she recognized him! She called him **Rabboni**. She was overjoyed to see him, and addressed him with a term of great respect. She calls him beloved teacher! He had obviously taught her much.

But Jesus has another message for her. He is not there to have his body glorified by their spices. He is not there to be treated like a dead corpse. He says **“Do not hold on to me.”** This is more accurate and more meaningful than the King James Version **“touch me not.”** He has a message for her, and she now has a task. **“Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’”**

Mary didn't want to let go. She didn't want to let things change. But she must let go. Jesus' death and resurrection had changed their relationship. He would no longer walk and talk with his disciples the same way he had been doing. Jesus told her not to keep on clinging to him because in the new relationship he would be her ascended Lord. She wasn't going to lose Jesus, but have him in a new way.

And then of course what did Mary do? **“Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: ‘I have seen the Lord!’ And she told them that he had said these things to her.”** She tells others!

Jesus called his followers **“brothers”**. They had the same Father as Jesus, they by faith, he by nature. And they shared the same inheritance of everlasting life in the presence of the Father. Jesus would return to be with God – with whom he had been one since the beginning.

So what does Easter mean to others? Do you know people who really don't know the full story and what it means? Can you tell them? The heart of the full story is that Jesus rose from the dead after paying for the sins of all mankind. The application of that full story is that everyone who believes this has life, too.

Before he died, Jesus said: **“search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me.”** John 5:39-40 (NKJV) The words we have heard today, too, testify about Jesus. Our lessons and messages today tell us the most important message of Christianity: Jesus Christ has risen from the dead after paying for your sins!

Let us follow Mary's eagerness to tell others about Jesus and what he has done for all mankind. May that be the result of the joy of the morning of the Resurrection! Amen.